CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NEWS RELEASE

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STATE SCHOOLS CHIEF O'CONNELL ANNOUNCES CALIFORNIA KIDS' 2002 PHYSICAL FITNESS RESULTS

SACRAMENTO—State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell today announced results of last spring's physical fitness testing of California students in grades 5, 7, and 9. Approximately 92 percent of school districts submitted data in 2002, with 1,265,546 students participating in the spring 2002 administration. The increase in district participation has risen steadily since 1999.

Students must meet the minimum fitness standards for *all* six areas of the test to be considered fit; only 24 percent of students in the three grades tested achieved that goal. In grade 5, 25.6 percent of students tested, 26.6 percent in grade 7, and 25.2 in grade 9 passed at least five of the six fitness standards.

"I am concerned that such a small percentage of students is meeting the minimum requirements for health-related physical fitness," O'Connell said. "Inactive children are at risk for serious health conditions, many of which may continue into adulthood. I encourage schools to use these results to review and improve their programs to ensure that students are learning the life-long skills needed to become and stay healthy."

Statewide physical fitness testing in California public schools was re-established by Assembly Bill 265 in 1995. The law requires that school districts administer a physical fitness test, designated by the State Board of Education, to all 5th, 7th, and 9th graders annually. The designated test used was the Fitnessgram, developed by the Cooper Institute for Aerobic Research.

Senate Bill 896, (statues of 1998), requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to report results to the Governor and Legislature at least once every two years. The State Superintendent, however, determined that an annual report would be more helpful in monitoring student progress.

The Fitnessgram in 2002 assessed six major fitness areas, including aerobic capacity (cardiovascular endurance), body composition (percent of body fat), abdominal strength and endurance, trunk strength and flexibility, upper body strength and endurance, and overall flexibility. A number of

testing options were provided so that all students, including those with special needs, had the opportunity to participate (see Attachment 1).

Subgroup data indicated that in grades 5 and 7, more females than males met all six fitness standards, but more males than females achieved the six standards in grade 9. Across all grade levels, more females than males were in the healthy fitness zone for flexibility, body composition, and trunk extension strength, but more males than females were in the fitness zone for abdominal strength and upper body strength.

A further breakdown of the results showed that 48 to 57 percent of students across all grades met the minimum fitness standard for aerobic capacity. From 61 to 69 percent met the standard for body composition, upper body strength, and flexibility. The strongest showing across all grades was in trunk strength, where 80 to 86 percent of the students met the minimum standard.

"The fact that a majority of students are not aerobically fit indicates a need for more emphasis on cardiovascular activity. Schools should provide the opportunity to address these low levels of physical fitness in our children by providing quality physical education experiences with sound instructional practices," said O'Connell.

The average school day includes additional opportunities for physical activity such as recess/break activities and organized activities that take place at lunch and before and after school. These diverse activities are designed to meet the needs and interests of all students.

A recent analysis by the CDE compared 2001 results of physical fitness testing with the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT 9), given as part of the California Standardized Testing and Reporting Program. The analysis showed a significant relationship between academic achievement and fitness.

"In addition to health concerns, the positive and distinct relationship between physical fitness and academic achievement provides yet another factor for our schools to consider when making decisions and designing programs for our students," O'Connell said. "Annual fitness testing should be seen as a useful source of information on program effectiveness, much like academic testing."

The 2002 physical fitness results for schools, districts, counties, and the state are available on the CDE's Web site: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/statetests/pe/pe.html>. No individual student data is reported on the Internet.

For more information, contact Debbie Vigil at 916/319-0341 or Dianne Wilson-Graham at 916/319-0280.

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Attachment